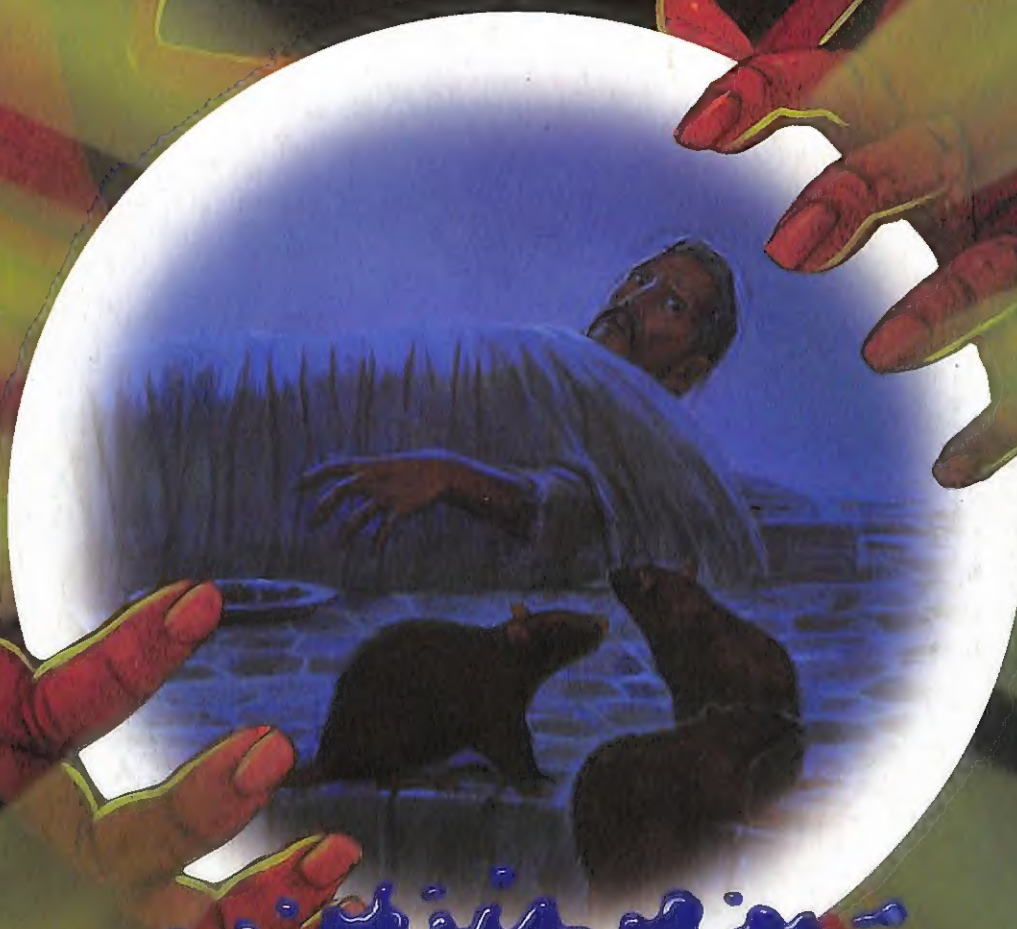


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Section Editors: Carey Denton, Christine Hatt,
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Deputy Art Editor: Andy Archer,
Designer: Jessica Watts
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Empty Eyes

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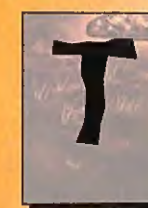
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THE WRATH OF PELE



endrils of wispy steam rose here and there from the
sunken landscape that was the summit of Kilauea,
one of the active volcanoes on the island of Hawaii.

"It looks more like the surface of the moon than
part of a tropical island," David's dad commented as
the family took in the view from the museum at the park's
headquarters.

"Is it going to blow?" David's younger brother, Richard, asked
with some concern.

David shook his head. "Do you think they would let all of
these tourists anywhere near this place if the volcano was going
to erupt?" He gestured towards about a dozen people who were
also enjoying the view.

"Actually, they would," someone said. David turned to see the
speaker, a pleasant-faced young man who appeared to be an
islander. "Kilauea has actually been in a state of eruption since
1983," he informed them. "Sometimes it's more spectacular
than others. Pele's been busy."



"What's Pele?" David asked.

The young man smiled. "Not what – who. Pele is the great fire goddess, and her home is there in Halemaumau." He pointed to a distant depression in the floor of the crater. "She's moody and short-tempered, and when she's angry, she stamps her foot so hard the ground quakes." He looked thoughtful for a moment. "But Pele is a builder, too. At times she sends lava to the sea. When the fiery flows harden, they have been known to add hundreds of hectares of new land to the island."

"That sounds spectacular," David's mum said, her eyes filled with wonder as she gazed at the volcano.

"It is," the islander responded. "Actually, if you want to get a closer look at the lava reaching the sea, just drive about twenty miles out towards the ocean and see for yourself. But be careful. The water may look calm, but it can be dangerous if you get too close."

"Can we go, Dad? Please," Richard begged.

David looked hopefully at his parents. "It sounds really great!" he exclaimed. "Maybe I could even find some rocks for my collection."

The young islander quickly held up his hand. "Oh, no. Pele is a selfish goddess. It would be disrespectful for a stranger to steal what is hers, and anyone who does will inevitably feel her revenge." His tone grew ominous. "Some say that in retribution Pele claims the offender's spirit as her own to serve her forever, initiating her new slave in a bath of fire."

Then the young man winked, making David unsure if the grim tale was meant to be taken seriously or not.



Once they were back in the hire car, David's mum took a look at the map. "Here it is," she said tracing a line with her finger. "It really isn't that far out of our way."

David's father smiled. "Well then, let's go."

From the back seat Richard suddenly asked, "People don't really believe that stuff about the fire goddess, do they?"

"I'm sure many do," his mum answered. "These islands have a very rich history and tradition."



Besides, we shouldn't just discount something because we don't understand it."

"True," his father added. "But that man at the museum was making the story more dramatic for our benefit. The earthquakes on this island are caused when pressure builds up and is released in the volcanoes, not when some mythological goddess stamps her foot."

After a few miles the highway narrowed and finally became no more than a dirt road. David's dad pulled into an open area that appeared to be a visitors' car park, and everyone got out. All around were signs of past lava flows. Jumbles of black and reddish-brown volcanic rock sloped down to the sea. Here and there, vegetation had gained footholds to form surprisingly lush, green oases scattered over an otherwise barren landscape.

"There's the path!" David yelled, racing ahead.

"Not so fast," his mum called out. She pointed to a sign near the path that said CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC.

"Oh, come on," Richard begged. "There's nobody here."

"Who's going to know if we go a little closer," David insisted. "I really want to get a piece of rock as a souvenir."

Their mum shook her head. "I'm sure they had a good reason for closing the path. Remember what the man at the museum said. This area can be quite dangerous."

"And as for taking a rock," their dad added sternly, "even if you don't share someone else's beliefs, you really must respect their wishes."



As David walked glumly back to the car, he noticed a glassy black rock on the ground and, since no one was watching, picked it up. Heavy for its size, the rock felt smooth and warm in his hand. 'What can it hurt? There's plenty left for Pele,' he thought. 'We'll be gone by tomorrow.' Slipping the rock into his pocket, David looked up to see Richard staring at him with that you're-not-supposed-to-do-that look in his eye. Knowing Richard liked secrets, David put a finger to his lips, signalling his little brother not to tell.

The next afternoon David sat quietly in the window seat of the aeroplane that would take him and his family back home.

David was sorry to be leaving, but he was glad he had come away with his special souvenir. He could feel the shape of the glassy black rock in the pocket of his jeans. He fidgeted in his seat. The rock still felt warm... uncomfortably warm.

"Are you OK, honey?" his mum asked.

"Yeah," David replied. Below, the islands slipped from view, and there was only sparkling blue ocean as far as the eye could see. The unpleasant sensation passed. "I'm fine."

It was very late when the family arrived at Auckland Airport in New Zealand, and past midnight when they got home.

David could barely keep his eyes open while he undressed for bed. As he threw his jeans over the back of a chair, the glassy black rock fell out of his pocket and rolled into the centre of the room. Picking it up, he tossed the rock on to his desk, crawled into bed, and fell fast asleep.

When David woke up it was already nine o'clock. Feeling groggy and jet-lagged, David pulled the blanket over his head and tried to go back to sleep.

But then his eyes popped open. Was something burning?

Slipping out of bed, he traced the source of the acrid smell to a small patch on top of his desk that appeared slightly charred. At the centre of the marred spot was the volcanic rock.

"This is really weird," David muttered under his breath. He reached out and touched the wooden desk top. It was eerily warm, but the rock itself was cool.

"There's a logical explanation for this," he said aloud. "This kind of rock probably gives off heat for a while."

He dumped out all the pencils from a metal box on his desk, slid the rock into the box, and snapped the lid shut. Then he slipped the box into his T-shirt drawer and hurried to get dressed. But as he opened his bedroom door to head downstairs for breakfast, he once again caught a faint whiff of smoke. It was coming from his T-shirt drawer.

Hoping that he was wrong, David pulled open the drawer, then stepped back in horror. The metal tin was glowing, and the T-shirts near it were badly scorched.

Without thinking, he reached out for the metal box. Pain seared through his fingertips. It was red hot. He instantly pulled his fingers away. "What am I going to do?" he moaned. He couldn't ask his parents for help. They would want to know where the rock came from, and he would have to admit that he had disobeyed them. But then he had an idea.

Racing to his wardrobe, David frantically tossed aside a few things, then dragged out his science kit. He pulled out a pair of metal tongs. Manoeuvring carefully, he used the tongs to lift open the lid of the metal box. He then clamped them around the glowing rock.



Creeping downstairs, still gripping the rock with the tongs, David pressed himself against the wall to avoid being seen by his parents, who were busily preparing a late breakfast in the kitchen.

Sweat trickled down his forehead, but he managed to slide the glass patio door open silently. Once outside, he tossed the bizarre rock into the fish-pond that his dad had so proudly constructed in one corner of the garden.

The water in the pond spluttered and sizzled as the rock slipped beneath the surface, and two or three small goldfish swam up close to investigate, then quickly zipped away.



"It's the strangest thing I've ever seen in my life!" David's dad said later that day as he stepped through the patio doors holding a shallow bucket. "The pond has completely dried up."

David, sitting at the kitchen table working on an aeroplane model with Richard, snapped his gaze up to his father. A stab of fear made his muscles tighten.

David's mum turned from the sink where she'd been peeling apples to make a pie. "What on Earth do you mean? How could the pond dry up, just like that?"

"Just what I said," he responded. "It's as dry as a bone. This is all that was left." He opened a newspaper on to the kitchen floor and emptied the contents of the bucket. Several withered fish lay lifeless within a tangled mat of parched water plants. He shook the bucket and a small, glassy black rock slid out.

"Hey, David," Richard began. "That's the rock you..." But David kicked him sharply under the table.

"I just don't understand," their father said in puzzlement. "It hasn't been that hot here, and it should take weeks for the water to evaporate like this. I know I checked the level before we went away." He shook his head and said, "I suppose I should check to see if there are any leaks."



David's mum carefully put down her peeling knife. "Well, I've got to see this for myself," she declared.

"Me, too," Richard added, bounding from his chair.

David looked at the dead fish. "I'll just throw these poor creatures in the bin."

When the rest of the family was outside, David bent down, and with trembling fingers, picked up the now cool rock. Clutching it tightly in his fist, he whispered fearfully as if trying to appease some invisible being. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you angry." Then he slipped the rock into his pocket, wrapped the dead fish and plants in the newspaper, and stuffed them into the rubbish bin.

The patio door slid open again and everyone trooped back into the kitchen.

"It's really weird," Richard announced. "Don't you want to see it, David?"

But before he could answer, his mother put her hand on his forehead. "Are you OK?" she asked with concern. "You look a little feverish."

"I'm fine," he lied. How could he tell her about the icy dread that was seeping into his thoughts... the growing terror that an ancient being on the other side of the ocean was seeking retribution for his thoughtless act?

Throughout the rest of the day, he tried to figure out what to do. Just when it seemed there was no way to get rid of the rock, David had an idea. Going straight to his father's garden shed, he found a small shovel. He

took it and scooped a shallow hole in the rich, dark soil of the flower garden. With his heart pounding, David fished the rock from his pocket, dropped it into the hole, and quickly covered it up.

"There," he declared. "Now you can't do any more harm."

The next night, David's parents went out to dinner, leaving him in charge of taking care of Richard.

"Here's the telephone number of the restaurant where we'll be," his mum said, handing David a piece of notebook paper. "We won't be late. I've told Mrs Samuels next door that you two will be home alone, and she said she'd be happy to come over if you need anything."

"We'll be fine, Mum," David replied.

With the rock buried in the flower garden now out of his mind, David was confident that he had beaten Pele's wrath. Thirty minutes later he felt the first tremors beneath his feet.

"David! Did you feel that?" Richard questioned, looking up from the TV screen. "Was it an earthquake?"

"Probably," David responded casually. He was used to the tiny quakes that were common to the North Island.

Suddenly a stronger tremor shook the house and Richard dived under the sturdy wooden coffee table.

David screamed for his brother to stay put. From his vantage point, he had a clear view of the patio and garden beyond, and what he saw made his legs buckle: a huge,



jagged rift had opened in the flower bed. As the house shook more violently the rift widened, and red flames spewed high into the night sky.

Riveted to the spot, David watched in horror as a tall, slender being rose from within the inferno. Her entire body glowed intensely as if it were white hot, and her long hair flickered and danced like flames.

"Goddess Pele!" he managed to choke out.

Her fiery eyes blazed with anger, and she held out her hands to David while the ground continued to vibrate and things tumbled down around him.

"Noooooo!" he shrieked, as the words of the young islander at the museum screamed in his brain: 'Some say that in retribution the Goddess Pele claims the offender's spirit as her own to serve her forever.'

Twisting away, David attempted to run, but a wall of fire sprang up around him, blocking his retreat. Through the blaze, he could see Richard cringing in terror under the coffee table. "Give her the rock back!" he screamed.

"It's too late!" David cried. Then, against his will, he moved helplessly towards the fiery goddess.

THE END

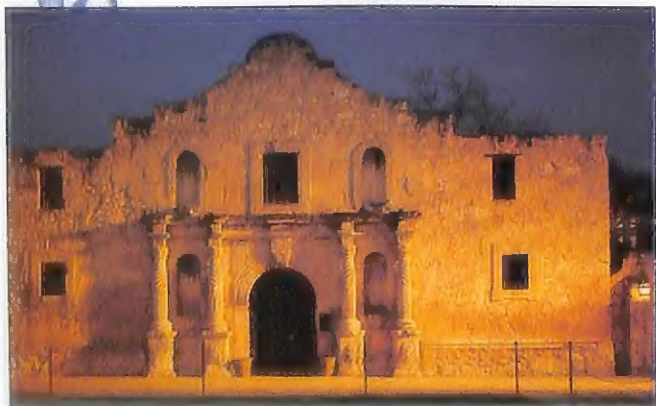


OUR HAUNTED WORLD



GHOST TOWN

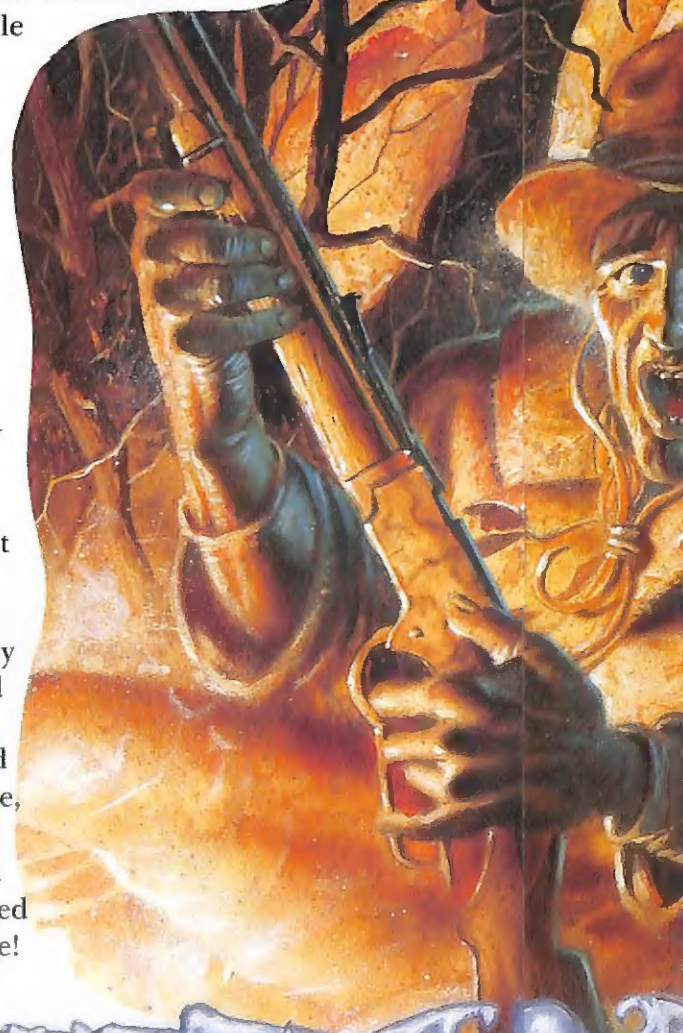
In the siege at The Alamo (below), in San Antonio in 1836, thousands of brave soldiers lost their lives. One young woman looked on in horror as her heroic husband suffered a fatal blow to the chest from an enemy's sword. Over a century later, her wailing can still be heard behind the walls of the basement. People say that the sound is so disturbing that those who hear it start sobbing too! Ghosts torment this battle-scarred town, believed to be one of the most haunted in America. At the Menger Hotel, the spirit of Sallie White, a chambermaid shot by her husband in 1876, roams the fourth floor in a long skirt and a bandana. Another ghost has been seen knitting and reading a paper! Elsewhere, at the theatre downtown, the chef had to be rescued after a spritely spirit pushed him into the kitchen fridge!



Ghosts galore roam the cowboy country of Texas, USA...

RUNNING LOOSE

Texan cattle ranchers still get spooked when the ghostly tale of two brothers is told around the campfire. One day in 1890, Zack and Gil were bringing in the herd when they spotted an outstanding young bull. He was such a fine animal that Zack and Gil both wanted to keep him. They argued so much that Zack, in a terrible rage, shot Gil dead. Zack felt so ashamed of his crime that he could not keep the calf. Instead, he named it 'Murder' and let it loose to roam the wilderness. When the calf died, its ghost lived up to the name and brought terror and tragedy to cowboys who came near it. Today's Texan farmers had better watch out – if the tale lives on after 100 years, perhaps the ghost does too!



THE RAILWAY CHILDREN

Legend has it that if you park your car over the railway tracks on the Loop 410 intersection in Southern Texas, ghosts will push it uphill out of the way of an oncoming train. The 'ghost tracks' got their reputation after a terrible tragedy years ago, when a train collided with a school bus full of children. Some say that if you pass the spot, the children's fingerprints will shine on your bumper to help you get home safely.

IN A FLAP!

A giant winged creature (like this model on the right) swooped over terrified Texans in 1976, according to reports. A man from



Raymondsville ran for cover when the bird – with a wingspan of 6m – grabbed his clothes with its savage claws. He escaped its clutches but was almost blown away by its gigantic bat-like wings. A month later, three teachers were driving to school when the creature lunged at their car. When they got to school, they identified it in the encyclopedia as a pteranodon – thought to have become extinct millions of years ago!

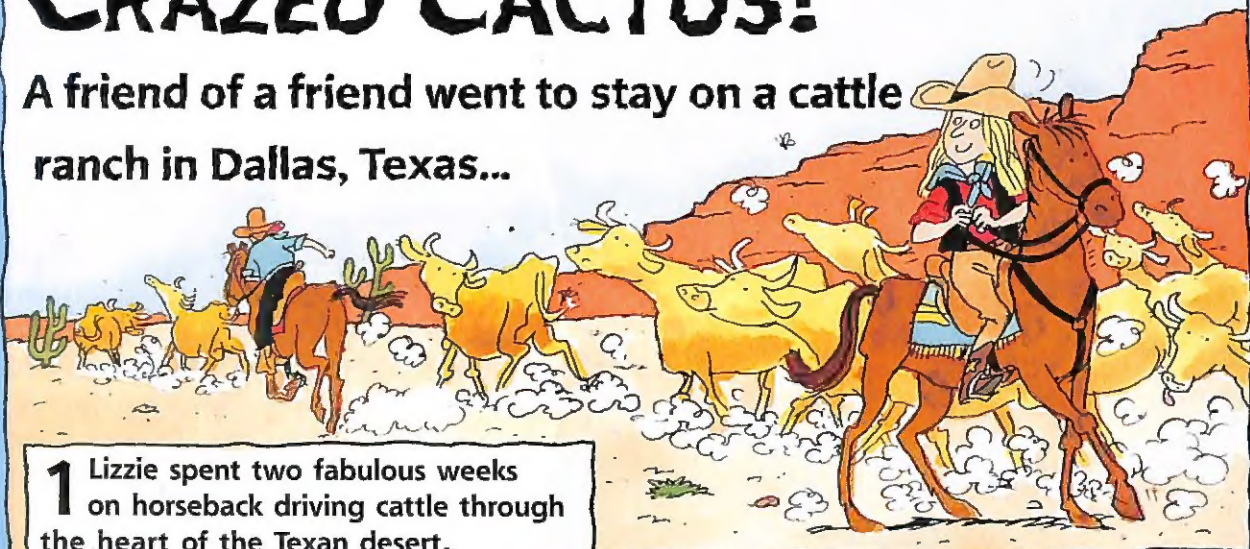


MARFA LIGHTS

When the sun goes down at Marfa, beams of light run across the mountain like a grass fire. They bounce around, vanish, then reappear. Sightings have been reported for more than 100 years, so they can't be the beams of a car. Locals believe that the 'Marfa lights', as they are known, could be the ghosts of massacred Indians, or ghost campfires of a destroyed wagon train. Some say they are guiding lights to hidden treasure. So desperate are people to find out the real truth that cowboys gallop up to them in the desert, drivers chase them, and pilots try to fly into them – all without success. What will Man think of next to try to solve the Marfa mystery?

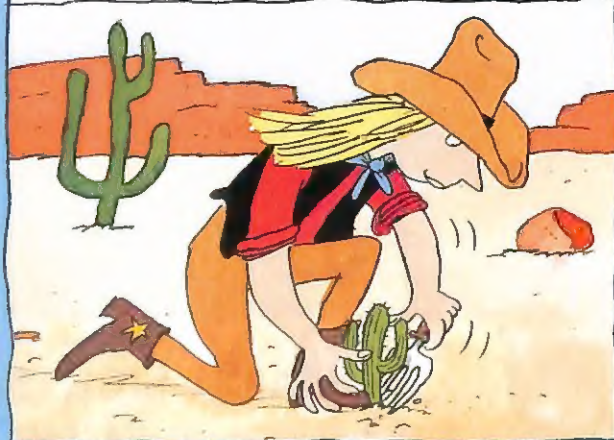
CRAZED CACTUS!

A friend of a friend went to stay on a cattle ranch in Dallas, Texas...

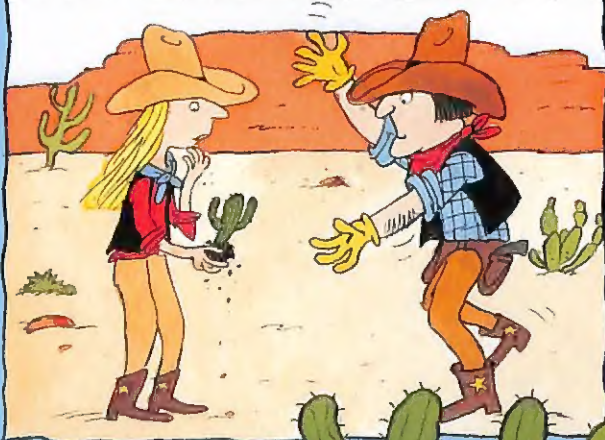


1 Lizzie spent two fabulous weeks on horseback driving cattle through the heart of the Texan desert.

2 At the end of her trip, she decided to take home a souvenir to remind her of cowboy country – a mini cactus.



3 The cattle farmer warned her that it would grow rapidly when watered, but she took it all the same.



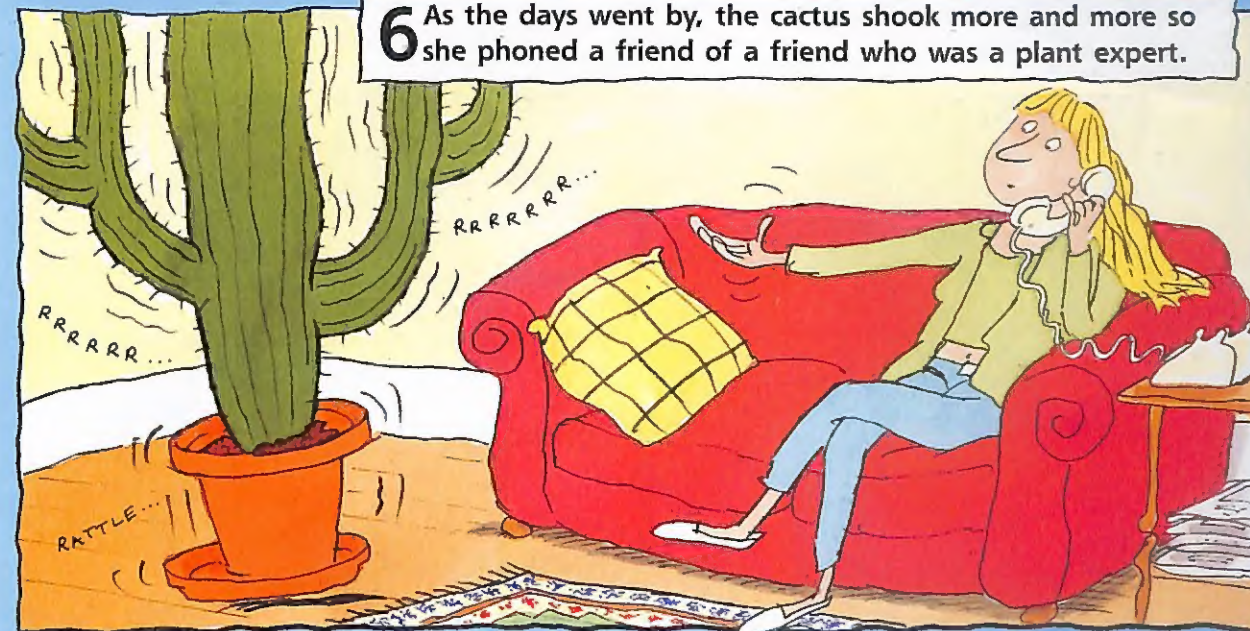
4 After arriving home, she began to water the tiny cactus and, sure enough, it doubled in size overnight.



5 It got so big that Lizzie had to move it to the floor. It was then that she noticed something peculiar... the cactus was vibrating!



6 As the days went by, the cactus shook more and more so she phoned a friend of a friend who was a plant expert.



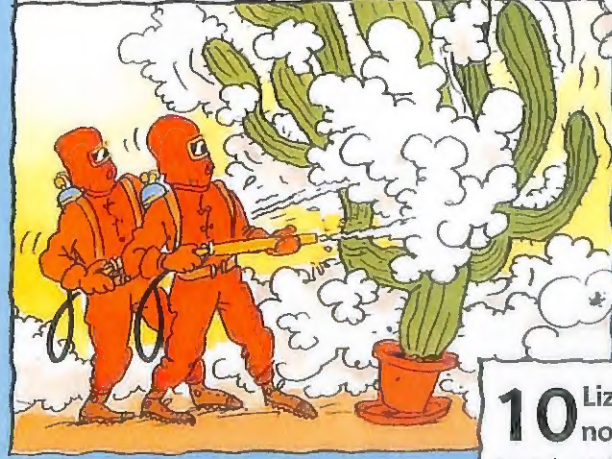
7 "This is serious," said the man. "Get out of the house immediately. We will send someone right over. Don't panic."



8 Within moments, an unmarked van screeched to a halt and two masked men with spray guns stormed inside.



9 Lizzie watched in horror as the men blasted the giant cactus. "Stand back, lady," cried one. "It's going to explode!"



10 Lizzie jumped back, but not in time. The cactus blew apart and hundreds of deadly desert tarantulas shot straight at her!





THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Special Investigation File: 39

Subject: a mysterious masked prisoner

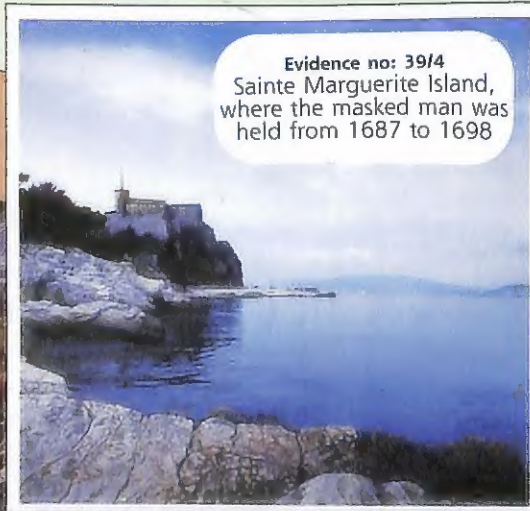
Place: various jails in France

SpineChiller creates a file

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Louis XIV, King of France from 1643 until 1715, imprisoned many of his enemies. One man was held in conditions of particular secrecy. He was taken into custody in 1669 and remained under lock and key, in four different prisons, until his death 34 years later. To stop his jailers recognising him, he had to wear a velvet mask fastened with iron clips.

The French writer Voltaire was imprisoned in the Bastille in Paris some years after the mystery man died there. He called the prisoner 'the man in the iron mask' and the description stuck. In 1850, Alexandre Dumas wrote a novel called 'The Man in the Iron Mask', fixing the idea in people's minds. But now historians are less interested in what the man wore than in who he was and what crime he committed.



Evidence no: 39/4
Sainte Marguerite Island,
where the masked man was
held from 1687 to 1698

Evidence no: 39/2
François Marie
Arouet, the writer
known as Voltaire



Evidence no: 39/3
Caricature of
Alexandre Dumas



Evidence no: 39/6
Leonardo DiCaprio
in the 1998 film
'The Man in the
Iron Mask'



THE DAUGER DOSSIER

Since the late 19th century, evidence has grown that the masked man was a valet, Eustache Dauger. Historians have pieced together the life story of this new prime suspect. Its main events were as follows:

- born 1637 into a wealthy family;
- childhood friend of Louis XIV;
- led a wild life and ended up penniless;
- at Louis XIV's request, went on secret missions to see English king Charles II;
- arrested in Dunkirk in 1669 on his return from England;
- died in 1703 in the Bastille;
- buried under the name of Marchioly.

WHAT DID HE KNOW?

The details of Dauger's life and death match those of the masked man. He was probably imprisoned because he knew a secret that would damage the king if revealed. This secret could be any of the following:

- 1 Information gained during his missions to England. The English king, Charles II, was a Catholic in a largely Protestant country. He wanted money from Louis XIV, also a Catholic, to promote his religion. It may be that Dauger learned too much about these sensitive matters.
- 2 Dauger was the illegitimate son of Louis XIV's father, Louis XIII, and Dauger's mother, Marie. This seems unlikely as Marie was a pious woman who would probably not have betrayed her husband.
- 3 Louis XIV was the illegitimate son of Dauger's father, François, and Louis XIII's wife, Anne. This is more likely, as Louis XIII and his queen remained childless for many years. It may be that the king was not able to father children, so turned to someone else to provide him with an heir.

CONCLUSION

The identity of the Man in the Iron Mask remains uncertain. He may have been a half-brother of Louis XIV, although probably not his twin, as suggested in the 1998 film of the story. Dauger is still the most likely candidate, but historians are continuing to investigate.

Unexplained

Dear Béatrice

Paris, 1771

Have you heard the rumour about the mysterious masked prisoner? Voltaire claims that he was none other than Louis XIV's illegitimate half-brother. According to this theory, the king threw his relative into jail so that he could not make a rival claim to the throne. It's wonderful gossip, but is it true? Let's hope we find out soon.

Yours affectionately
Sylvie



Chapter 2

The Pit And The Pendulum

Retold from a story by Edgar Allan Poe

With my arms and legs shaking, I groped my way back to the wall. I decided that I would rather perish there than risk the terrors of the pit. My feverish brain now pictured many pits in various places around the dungeon. At any other time, I might have had the courage to throw myself into one and end it all. But now, I was reduced to being the greatest of cowards. I had read about these pits and

knew that they were not intended to bring a quick, painless death to anyone who had the misfortune to fall in them.

It took many hours for me to calm down enough to sleep. When I awoke, I found a loaf and a jug of water next to me. I had a terrible, burning thirst and gulped down the entire contents of the jug in one go. The liquid must have been drugged, because I then fell into a deep sleep. I don't know exactly how long it lasted, but when I came to, things had changed. My cell was no longer in complete darkness. Instead there was a glow that gave enough light for me to see the cell measurements. I had been quite wrong. It was no more than half the size that I had calculated.

I thought very hard about how I had made this mistake. I decided that I must have walked right past the strip of cloth that I had placed on the floor as a marker. It didn't matter. What could be less important in my situation? Yet I was not able to stop myself. I had got not only the size of my cell wrong, but also its shape and even what it was made of. It was square and only the floor was built from stone. The walls, by contrast, were constructed of huge plates of metal. The angles and depressions that I had felt on my trip around the room were simply where the plates joined.

Bathed in the strange, glowing light, I shuddered at what was painted on the sides of my prison. It was a collection of the most ghastly creatures. Hideous fiends, glowing, white skeletons and many other



monstrosities disfigured the cell walls. Their terrifying outlines were clear but their colours seemed blurred.

I saw all this with extreme difficulty because I was now strapped to some sort of flat, wooden frame. The strap was wrapped around me many times, just like a bandage only much stronger. Only my head and the bottom half of my left arm were free. I soon became aware that my mouth was dry and I was hungry. With much effort, I was able to reach some food that lay in a dish by my side. I ate a portion of the spicy meat, which left me feeling even more thirsty. Then I reached around hopefully for the jug of water that I expected would accompany my meal. To my absolute horror, the jug was not there. I realised that the evil Inquisitors now intended a raging thirst to overcome me.

In desperation, I looked across the prison floor. There was no water jug, but neither were there the dozens of holes that I had feared. Instead there was one circular

pit right in the middle. I had only just managed to escape its terrible jaws. But now another gruesome fate awaited me.

I looked up. The ceiling was about thirty or forty feet away and seemed to be made of metal, too. Then my eyes rested on a painting on the ceiling. It was a portrait of Old Father Time, but with one unusual alteration. In the place of the scythe that he normally carried, there was a massive pendulum, as on an old grandfather clock. Gazing up at the picture, I thought that I saw the pendulum move. Then I blinked and looked upwards once again. There was absolutely no doubting it. The pendulum was not part of the picture. It was real.

I watched the pendulum swing high above me for a long time. I was more amazed than fearful of its slow but deliberate movement. Then a strange scuttling sound on the floor startled me. Rats! Two, maybe three – all enormous in size – had managed to claw their way up from the depths of the pit. Quickly, they



were followed by more. They seemed to be attracted by the smell of the meat – my food – beside me. I looked straight into their eyes, which were glinting with evil hunger, and used all my efforts to scare them away.

Some time later, when I next looked up, I was stunned. It took some time to get my poor, swooning mind to understand exactly what had happened. The pendulum had increased in length and was moving faster. I could now hear a definite hiss as it swung through the air. I estimated that it had grown about three feet since I had last observed it. This meant that, although it was still a long way from me, it had got closer. Now I could see the pendulum's evil design very clearly. Right at the end of its brass rod was a crescent of highly polished steel more than a foot long. I stared at it with despair and terror. Its lower edge was sharpened like a giant razor, and that edge was the closest part of the pendulum to me.

I could no longer doubt the doom that had been prepared for me by the torturers of the Inquisition. I knew that the hell-like pit they had tried to surprise me into was considered their most hideous punishment.

I had avoided that by nothing more than a hair's breadth. But surprise was also known to be a vital part of their devilish plans. They had no intention of forcing me into the pit now that I knew about it. Instead they had devised, with fiendish cleverness, a different form of death for me. But it would be equally painful and terrifying.

For hour after awful hour, I watched and counted with dread the swings of the mighty, razor-tipped pendulum. Inch by inch, gradually, unceasingly, it crept down towards me. Its journey was painfully slow. Days of this unbearable torture passed until the blade swept so close that it fanned my body, and the smell of steel forced itself into my nostrils.

I prayed for the pendulum to descend more quickly so that it would finish me. I even strained upwards, deliberately trying to throw my body into the path of the blade. There were moments, too, when madness completely overcame me and I lay still, smiling at the glittering crescent above me,

WORD POWER

depressions – areas set back from a surrounding surface; hollows

disfigured – ruined or spoilt the appearance of

scythe – a farm tool with a large, curved blade used for cutting grass

cleave – split in two

ghoulish – over-concerned with unpleasant matters

lingering – very slow; drawn-out

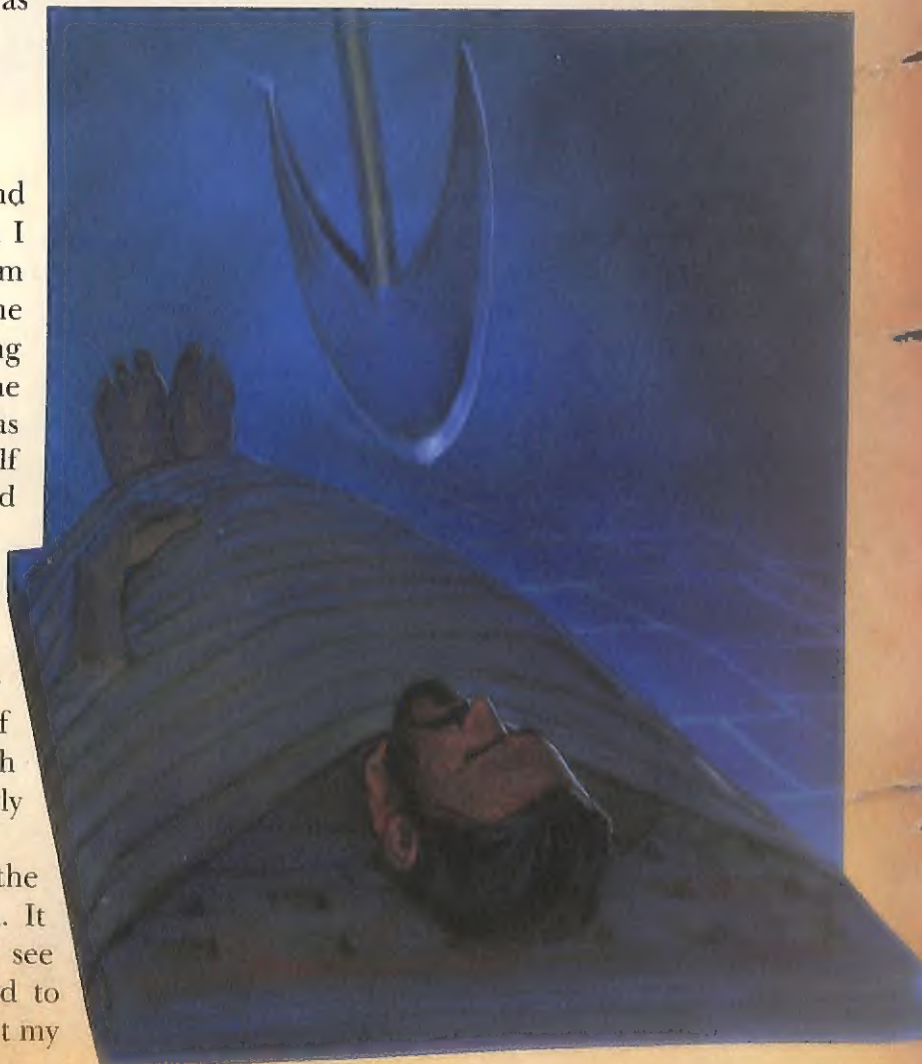
just as a child smiles at a shiny bauble or new toy. But this was no child's toy. It was a deadly instrument of torture. And it was heading straight for me.

I eventually became unconscious and remained so for some time. When I came to, I found that the pendulum was no closer. Those demon monks – the Inquisitors – must have been watching me closely. They would only lower the instrument of my death when I was awake and could see it. I found myself sick and weak. I was desperately in need of food. I stretched out my hand and found a tiny portion of my meal remaining, the part spared by the rats. I ate and felt hope and joy – hope over a fragment of rotting meat and joy over its spicy flavour. My long period of suffering, the torment that my fiendish torturers had put me through, was slowly driving me mad.

The steel crescent at the end of the pendulum still passed back and forth. It was now so close to me that I could see where it would strike. It was designed to slice through the coarse robe I wore, cut my

chest and then cleave my heart in two. I took a ghoulish interest in exactly how the pendulum would strike me. As it was moving down so slowly, my death would be a lingering one. At first, the blade would only fray the robe I wore. It would return, again and again. Just cutting through the cloth would take many minutes.

I could not, no, dared not, think of what would happen after that. Instead I concentrated on the idea of the blade cutting through the cloth, as if by thinking hard I could stop its descent. Then I began to wonder what sort of sound the razor would make as it finally tore away my robe. I thought about this until my teeth were on edge. And still the swinging pendulum travelled grimly downwards.





BURNING QUESTIONS

Fire is very dangerous – and it's best not to mess around with it! But some people don't get the choice. Things burst into flames around them. They don't want it to happen or do anything to make it happen. But however hard they try, they just can't seem to be able to control their fiery outbursts.



FIERY TEMPER

Tong Tangjiang, a four-year-old from China, caused all sorts of alarm bells to ring when, in 1990, his underpants suddenly started smouldering. His parents rushed him to hospital – where different parts of his body caught fire and had to be extinguished over a two hour period.

Doctors said that the child was pulsing with alarmingly high rates of electricity, that peaked when he was over-excited or stressed, causing small fires to erupt!

► UP IN SMOKE

A cartoon from the 1850s hints that spontaneous combustion could be caused by excessive gin-drinking.

ALARMING CASE OF SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION.



"OH! LAW! THERE'S PA'S BOOTS—BUT WHERE'S PA?"

WHAT A SCORCHER!

Even more extraordinary is the case of Lily White of Antigua in the Caribbean, recorded by the famous investigator of the supernatural, Charles Fort, in 1929. Lily's clothes had a hideous habit of catching alight. Luckily, while sparks flew

around her, Lily remained unhurt. But she was certainly in need of a large wardrobe of clothes – and often had to resort to second hand offerings from her neighbours.

A BURNING QUESTION

These fiery phenomena may be pretty spooky but not as frightening as the claim that some people burst into such fierce flames that there is no time to help them. This is called 'spontaneous human combustion' (SHC). Scientists argue that SHC simply doesn't happen, but there have been some gruesome cases recorded where people have been incinerated, while furniture and surroundings have mysteriously remained untouched! What can the answer be?



▲ HIGH ENERGY

Could the seven energy centres of Eastern belief be the source of overheating in the human body?

FREAK VILLAGE

Fiery outbursts aren't restricted to individuals either. In 1990, an entire village in northern Italy became prone to unexplained fires. The problem started with a fire in an electricity fuse box. But electricians couldn't solve the problem and before long all sorts of things were bursting into flames, including an armchair and a pair of ski boots.



▲ SPARKY SPOOKS

It was claimed that these matchboxes burst into flames without igniting the matches. Could a poltergeist have been responsible?

The mayor thought the villagers were suffering from mass hysteria until he found the engine of his locked car running one morning and saw a car door burst into flames before his very eyes. The mystery remained unsolved. Although many villagers were terrified, they refused to leave in case their houses burnt down while they were away!

HOT STUFF

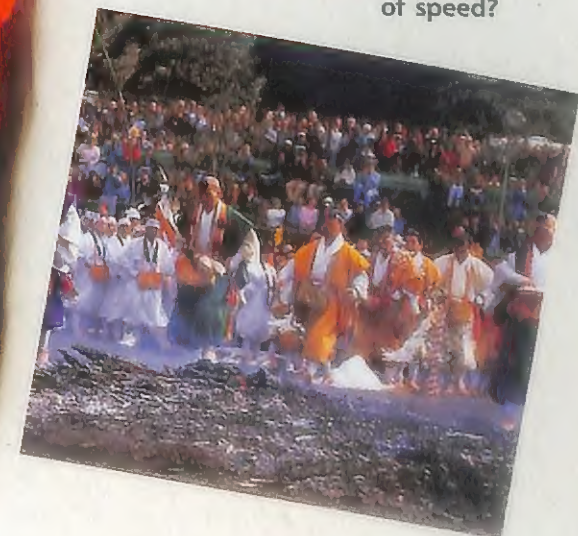
Humans have always been fascinated by fire, perhaps this is why blacksmiths – men and women who work with fire and metal – were once considered to have supernatural powers that gave them control over the flames.

In 1871, Nathan Cocker, a blacksmith from Maryland, USA, seemed to prove the point by casually allowing a white-hot shovel to cool on his bare feet, swilling molten lead in his mouth until it was cold and solid, and calmly picking glowing coals out of the fire! Was this really an example of supernatural powers at work?

When a fire breaks out mysteriously, some people may well put it down to pesky poltergeist spirits, or some may say it's the result of mysterious electrical charges. But, whatever you believe, one thing's certain – only very special people can play with fire without getting burnt!

▼ RUN FOR IT!

Is fire-walking a case of mind over body, or a trick of speed?



HAUNTED HIGHWAY PUZZLES

DISEMBODIED DRIVER!

Already headless, now the coachman is in several more pieces. Fit them together again and say which two are not needed!

PICK THE BONES

The bones spell 'E' for Castle Eerie. By moving two bones, make them all point the way there, instead!

FEARSOME FACTS

According to local legend in East Anglia, England, a horse-drawn coach is said to appear from amid mist and marshes at Christmas time – driven by a headless coachman!

RHYME TIME

Look for the tomb and broom in this scene. Now find four more rhyming pairs. To help you, the first ends with the letter 't', the second with 'e', third with a 'd' and the fourth with an 's'.

FREAKY FACTS

A disappearing London bus is also reported to have been heard and seen hurrying along at night, its interior lights on but with no driver at the wheel!

SLUGOREECT

HABT

SYSRAILUB

STRANGE SIGNPOST
Rearrange the letters to read the signpost properly.

HOWRINC

NOONDL

THINTOMANG

MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE

All the vowels are missing from this message.
Insert them to read what it says?

WRN-NG T-LL R-D-SRS!
PR-C-D-T Y-R PRL-F Y-DR!

HAUNTED HIGHWAY CODE!

What do the spooky road signs on this page say?

PHANTOM FACTS

A headless cyclist is one of a host of highway hauntings. There's an amazing variety of spectres, ranging from a ghostly motor-cyclist, a figure with a skeletal face and spooky hitch-hikers who vanish as mysteriously as they appear.

ANSWERS

DISMEMBERED DRIVER! The unwanted pieces are 2 and 8.
PICK THE BONES: (see diagram)
STRANGE SIGNPOST: NORWICH, LONDON, SAUSBURY, BATH, GLOUCESTER AND NOTTINGHAM.
RHYME TIME = bat/rat, snake/roake, rood/road and stocks/rocks.
MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE: Warning to all road users! Proceed at your peril, if you dare!
HAUNTED HIGHWAY CODE! The signs are: DEAD-END AHEAD, SCHOOL FOR SPOOKS, SKELETON CROSSING, NO HARRY HAND SIGNALS, LOW-FLYING BATS.

